

## **EXHIBIT A**

The Honorable Angel Kelley  
John Joseph Moakley U.S. Courthouse  
1 Courthouse Way, Suite 2300  
Boston, MA 02210

Dear Judge Kelley,

I am writing you this letter to tell you about my path; about what shaped my character and my values; about how I built my business and how I treated volume generation; about what I came to understand during the long months in prison, why I pleaded guilty and what I will do in the future.

I feel it is important to tell you my story in the pages of this letter. I sincerely apologize in advance for its size and for your time. I thank you for reading it.

I was born in 1998 during a difficult and dangerous time in Russia, with poverty after the collapse of the USSR and rampant organized crime. My apartment was in a panel of "social housing" on the outskirts of Moscow. My father's parents moved into house number 6, and in house number 8 lived my mother's parents. In the '90s, this neighbourhood was considered dangerous and was controlled by the "Izmailovsky" criminal group. I remember how, early in the morning on my way to kindergarten, I would find used syringes on the ground, which the janitors had not yet removed. From about 7 to 11 years old, I socialized with backyard kids, but I was lucky to get out of that group before violence and drugs came into their lives.

Despite my poor financial situation, because of my family, I did not end up in bad company. All my relatives have higher education (some even have two degrees), and we had been successful during the Soviet era. But after 1991, old enterprises and ministries closed down, the country collapsed, and my family fell by the wayside.

My mother, a historian by her first degree, fostered in me a love of historical literature, which I started reading from the age of five. When I turned 12, she took out a bank loan and took me on a trip to Italy to see all the museums and architectural complexes.

Her life has been hard. Her father committed suicide over gambling debts when she was 16. At 17, she married for the first time, running away from home because her mother had forced her to go to work instead of university. When she was 20, my mom separated from her first husband, studied at the Faculty of History and Archives, and worked for a hundred dollars a month. She met my father and soon began an affair that resulted in me. After spending a few months on maternity leave, she went back to work while studying for her master's degree in Public Economy. Later, she finished an MBA program, too.

My mom was always worried about our financial predicament. I remember her saying many times: "Alyosha, everyone will be brought to school by car, and we will travel by trolleybus, but

that doesn't mean you are worse off than others." Despite her words and love, I felt worse. I was embarrassed to invite friends home and resentful not to celebrate birthdays in cafes with my classmates. At 12, I entered a very privileged school where rich kids bullied me about my food, clothes, phone and coming by bus. It was a school for the children of the Russian elite, and they didn't accept me. In some way, I'm glad about it, because it motivated me. But in adulthood, working with a psychotherapist, I discovered that I had been driven to put all my successes, goals, and achievements on a shelf to prove to those cruel teenagers that I was no worse than them.

From early childhood, my mother fostered in me compassion for my neighbour, taught me to love freely, and to give without expecting anything in return. I always wanted her to be proud of me: captain of the volleyball team, a scholarship to Moscow State University, CEO of a large and well-known IT company in Russia. Now, I hate myself, listening to her trembling motherly voice in the prison phone receiver. I let her down and took away one of her most important achievements—pride in her successful son.

Even though my father was not around me until I was 18, his story is important too. He was born in 1975, and his entire youth was during "Perestroika." When he was 12, his mom died and his dad went headlong into work. He engaged in all kinds of business and trade, and in 2000, by age 25, he owned a small beverage company and also developed a distribution network.

Then everything collapsed. Criminal syndicates threatened him and my mom and me. According to my mother, my father arrived one evening bearing the clear mark of a gun's hot muzzle on his head and the news that his business partner had been killed. He left that night to live thousands of kilometers away in Siberia, saving my mother and me and his own life. But he lost everything he had built, and it broke him. For the next 15 years he was constantly trying to get back into business. Year after year, telling his dad, and later me, about grand plans and projects. But each time, something didn't work out. All of this led to him no longer being taken seriously within my family. They said, don't be like your dad, don't do nonsense (i.e. business). But during the rare meetings with my father, he would tell me so much about a new project that every time I believed he was about to succeed—that he would be able to open a restaurant, build a residential building, make a big trade contract. The strong faith led to strong annoyance after the collapse of his next idea. This is how my main fear was formed—to not repeat the rise and fall of my father.

In October 2024, that's exactly what happened. My company, Gotbit, was at its peak: a very recognizable brand in the industry, quadrupling revenue year-over-year, partnerships with giants of the financial world, events held in Singapore and Dubai, and a strong management structure. I myself, for the first time in six years, started taking vacations and spending more time with my wife. I felt that Gotbit had a huge leap ahead of us. In September 2024, during a company event in Singapore, I said, "Look up, friends. You see the logos of Goldman Sachs, Citi, Morgan Stanley (the event was in Downtown). Within four years, there will be a Gotbit logo somewhere nearby." I believed it myself and infected 200 of our employees with it as well.

Now, Gotbit is no more, shut down completely. So, I found myself inside my fear. It had become reality, except worse: I never dreamed I would end up in jail. I feared a fatal cash blowout, a major loss of client funds, or a scandal that destroyed the company's reputation. What has happened was beyond my imagination.

I started playing chess with my grandfather when I was five. A year later, I was beating him. After discovering my talent, I practiced constantly at home, playing against computer programs and at 7, I started attending a chess school every day from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m.

My first tournament ended in defeat, hysteria, and bitter tears. It was the first time I was confronted with the outside world, and I was lucky to have the experience of defeat so early and so visibly. I practiced harder, and for the next two years, I didn't lose often and eventually obtained a professional ranking.

The experience of hard work at the chessboard was good for my studies. From 1st to 6th grade, I studied in a regular school near my home. In 5th and 6th grade, I showed strong results in the Olympiad in mathematics and my family began to talk about me moving to a special school with a mathematical bias.

There are practically no private fee-paying schools in Russia, but there are state special schools for gifted children. They are free, they recruit from 7th grade, and there is a competition of 20-plus people for one place. My family decided that I should enter the best such math school in Moscow, the Lyceum "Second School."

At age 13, I didn't study for my Lyceum entrance exam. I thought I was very smart and I was lazy. The selection consisted of four exams and I failed the first one. I remember my disappointment, panic, and the pain the blow dealt to my perception of myself.

I dedicated myself into preparing to get in the next year. My mother found a school for me in the center of Moscow that offered advanced mathematics. During the first week, I discovered that most of the kids were from rich families. I got my dose of childhood cruelty to a member of another world and I developed an acute allergy to rich kids.

The next year, I went through a competition in which there were 40 applicants for every place and obtained admission to the Lyceum. The school was intense, with classes on Saturdays and a difficult curriculum. It also offered amazing opportunities. In addition to math and physics, I studied programming, build 3D models, modelled physical processes, and took an economics course that laid down my understanding of markets, capital and labor.

In the eleventh grade, I managed to win prizes at the Olympiads in physics and mathematics. My teachers were very proud of me and thanks to my two Olympiad diplomas, I received a full scholarship to the mathematics program at Moscow State University (our analog of MIT). Getting the scholarship was necessary to continue my studies since my family could not pay for

the six years my program required, and the announcement of my scholarship was one of the happiest moments in my life.

Mechmat MSU, my MSU faculty, is a special place—the hardest faculty of the best university in Russia. For all six years, students do deep, fundamental, theoretical mathematics. For many people, Mechmat reminds them of torture. I reasoned that if I could master the proposed 50 courses of higher mathematics, I could master anything. And, indeed, the main thing Mechmat taught is the skill of learning.

Moscow State University was the ideal place to form the Gotbit team. The first 20 employees were undergraduate students from Mechmat (mathematics), Physics, and VMK (the faculty of computer science). We had to understand the confusing world of blockchain together from scratch, and the ability to learn new things quickly came in very handy.

Alas, I did not manage to defend my diploma and graduate from MSU. I left Russia in February 2022 for Portugal, and the university administration did not allow people like me to take our exams remotely. They expelled me after completing five of the six years required to graduate.

In addition to my studies, MSU gave me the opportunity to continue my sports career. From 2017 to 2022, I played for the volleyball team. I remember experiencing the time of selection as no less stressful than exams because volleyball is my drug and playing for the university team was a dream (it is similar to Division I of the NCAA in the USA).

I joined volleyball at the age of 12 thanks to my grandfather. Since childhood, I was sickly and frail. My mother fondly called me lanky, and my father, on his rare appearances, joked about my thinness and slouching. My grandmother forever took me to doctors who forbade any sport. But my grandfather suggested that I try volleyball because of my height. I ended up being accepted to the Olympic Reserve Sports School in Moscow, a program that prepares athletes from childhood. It consists of daily practice sessions, training camps for several months every year, and national championship tournaments among all of Russia's sports schools.

In prison, I really miss volleyball. It not only brought me up, not only developed my spirit and body, but it gave me the most important person in my life: my wife Yulia.

Yulia and I met at my first volleyball training camp when we were both 13. We were friends for two years, and then we fell in love, and we have been inseparable for the 11 years since. Yulia is the love of my life.

Like me, she was born in 1998. Her family was also allocated a social apartment by the state, and she too grew up on the outskirts of Moscow. Yulia's childhood was much harder than mine. She went through years of her mom's alcoholism and domestic violence. Her older sister protected her at home, but she died when Yulia was 15. At that moment, Yulia and I were already together, and the tragedy brought us together forever.

Yulia delighted me and still does with her virtue. She volunteered at dog shelters, travelled to distant orphanages with troubled children to help and bring toys, and was a volunteer in a project supporting lonely old people. A year before my arrest, she worked for Project Manager, an American charity that was building a water pipeline in Africa.

Yulia always strived to become a better person and did better at it than me. She never chased money like I did, which amazed me because she experienced much more grief as a child than I did. She was always for sustainability, conscious consumption, and helping others. I had several arguments with her when she gave her last bit of money to a friend, a distant relative, or a child collecting for an operation. At one time, it even seemed weak to me—like she couldn't stand up for herself. I have come to realize that it is an incredible strength.

Every day since we fell in love, she gave her unconditional love and support to me. She taught me to think more broadly, to try new things, to be patient and not to give up. Yulia is my main luck in life.

When I was 16, I resold my first pair of sneakers. Since I was playing volleyball so intensively, I needed a new pair every month. I didn't have the money to buy from an official store, so I found Nike Outlet, which sold last year's collection at 50-80% off.

My first sneaker client was a friend from a rival sports school. The math of the transaction amazed me: in a regular store his sneakers cost \$150, in the outlet I bought them for \$50 and sold them to him for \$75. Having earned 50% on equity in two hours, I felt adrenaline. My heart was pounding, my world had changed.

A week later I had 10 clients, a month later I had over 50. I called the store MSU.sneakers (for some reason, I already wanted to be associated with MSU). Yulia helped and supported me a lot, including when many friends laughed and called me a "peddler from the '90s" because I was always walking around with two huge Nike bags filled with sneakers.

The business became a great adventure. I got to know hundreds of young athletes outside of Moscow who didn't have access to the Nike Outlet (it was only in Moscow). I also got to know everything about sneakers. I knew which models were best for different foot types, I knew which position in volleyball (and later in basketball) corresponded to which model, I knew which collections ran small and which ran large. By the time I left the Nike Outlet each evening, I memorized by heart the availability of sneakers in every size range. By the time I was 17, I was earning up to \$5000 in a good month—unreal money for a schoolboy/student in Moscow.

After three years of operation, the Nike Outlet closed and my supply of sneakers stopped. And despite receiving a scholarship to MSU, I needed to earn money for school. I hadn't saved much. It never occurred to me the next month I might stop earning, and I'd been living well and supporting myself, Yulia and sometimes members of her and my family. And while the scholarship gave me free metro tickets, discounted food at the MSU cafeteria, and a stipend of

\$50 a month, it was nothing like enough to cover even a few days of living expenses, not to mention rent.

After my sneaker business failed, I became an intern at a startup called Rega Risk Sharing, a company owned by friend of my father. Rega sought to bring insurance and the blockchain together. It had held a fundraising round in which investors would receive a Rega token to be used for the company's products but that also would have its own value and liquidity—something I soon learned was called a “utility token.” I joined the company after the fundraising was complete and was asked to prepare for the token's listing on crypto exchanges. This task defined my work for the next six years.

I negotiated with exchanges, prepared documents for compliance, and analyzed the markets to value our token. There were more than 100 exchanges and I poured over similar tokens' listings. When we went to pay for listings on two exchanges, the managers told us that we needed to hire a market maker to help market our token to meet the "activity" requirements. We were a week away from listing and I was tasked with researching and hiring the best market maker to do the job. After a few days of negotiations, when it became clear that the contract with the market maker would exceed our budget, my boss gave me the task of building software that would allow us to do it ourselves.

Over the next day, a coder friend from MSU and I created an algorithm for market making. It was a copy of the market makers' software that we learned about during my calls with them and from the promos they gave us. It performed four main functions:

- Arbitrage, i.e., equalizing prices between two exchanges;
- Providing liquidity, i.e., performing a transaction between a buyer and a seller to narrow the spread;
- Position management, i.e., buying and selling at set prices; and
- Volume generation, i.e., wash trading.

The market makers I negotiated with all provided these same services. They generated volume for their clients and crypto exchanges because of the exchanges' requirements for minimum market activity. As a rule, the minimum was from \$50,000 to \$200,000 in volume per day, depending on the exchange.

At the time we created our algorithm, I did not realize the fraudulent component of volume creation. I saw the process as an industry benchmark and was very happy with the level of code we wrote. Three months later, I found another customer, and six months later, Rega closed. That's how Gotbit started.

For the first couple of years, I did not think of Gotbit as a serious business: we had software, a few clients, and two or three employees but it wasn't enough, so I started other companies in parallel.

The most successful one was called SelfRecovery, the first Russian brand of massage guns. Such massagers are popular now, but seven years ago only a few people in Russia knew about them. A classmate and I created a website, designed the brand's identity, signed a trial contract with a Chinese factory, and recruited popular fitness bloggers for advertising (mostly by barter). We guessed the timing, packaging, and product well, and we sold out our first batch in a month. When I earned 200% on the Gotbit profits I'd invested, I felt the same flame as when I sold my first sneakers. We ordered a new batch, started to develop the brand, and opened a small warehouse—it seemed that SelfRecovery would become a great business. But then Covid hit, the Chinese factories closed down, the population's purchasing power collapsed, and I hastily sold off the stock at a loss.

I did not initially set out to be a businessman. I wanted to follow the beaten path of "study, study, career." I'd been warned since childhood not to repeat my father's mistakes and I sometimes wondered how I ended up in business at the age of 16 and, with a short break for Rega, stayed in business for the next 10 years. At the time, I didn't think about it, I saw opportunities and took them because each new one ignited a flame inside me as it was realized. Once in prison, I analyzed it more deeply and will share my thoughts with you.

First, poverty. Poverty is only learned by comparison. I was infinitely richer than starving children in India, but it just so happened that I spent my childhood and adolescence around wealthier people. I was touched by it and, to some degree, traumatized by it. As a consequence, when I made \$300 dollars in the first week of the sneaker business, I couldn't sleep, eat, or think about anything else. That hunger never left me.

Second, self-sufficiency. My mom moved away from me when I was 12. A few years later, when she moved to Serbia with my brother and stepfather, my grandfather gave me complete freedom: I could stay out all night, I could avoid doing my homework, I could do whatever I wanted. Thanks to this freedom, despite the censure of business in my family, I engaged in the sneaker business when I was 16 and no one reproached me. It was then, 10 years ago, that the foundations of my entrepreneurial mentality were laid.

Third, workaholism. Chess, studies, and volleyball all taught me that hard, regular work leads to positive changes and almost always to results. There was a period in 2020 when I worked 20 hours every day, sometimes for a few days without sleep (due to crypto markets being open 24/7). I worked every New Year's Eve and Christmas from 2019 to 2024. I was addicted to achievement from a young age.

Fourth, talent. I find that I have two main skills and I like the feeling I get from using them. My first talent is to be a leader. At the sports school I was not the tallest, the highest jumper, the most

technically sound, but I became the captain of the team. I was listened to and followed, and I always singled out my teammates and gave them a chance to prove themselves. Businesses gave me chances to lead.

My second talent is selling, in both a narrow and broad sense. I excelled in selling the company to potential employees at an interview, selling myself to participate in a conference, and of course, selling a product or service to a client. In my sneaker business, I became a personal consultant to each potential client. At Gotbit, I created and taught a culture of love for the client. I loved selling, and business not only allowed me to do it, but rewarded me for it.

Fifth, and finally, luck. Tolstoy in *War and Peace* proves to stubborn historians how small the role of the individual is in history and how coincidence determines both success and the formation of the individual. I agree with him. The success of Gotbit, a company with zero outside investment in seven years, becoming one of the top five crypto market makers, was survivor's bias. I was lucky—or so I thought at the time—to come across the idea for Gotbit. I felt that luck, and I wanted to take advantage of it.

I realize that I've delayed telling you the story of Gotbit because talking about it hurts my soul. It's a bit like writing about a child who died because of you. I failed over 200 employees and the shame is overwhelming. But it's time to tell you how I built Gotbit.

I will remember my first Gotbit client for the rest of my life. I met Vlad at a 100-person crypto conference in a basement in the center of Moscow. I was still working at Rega and I told him about our market making algorithm and showed it in action on the Rega token. Vlad ran a marketing agency that worked with similar projects with their own tokens, and he suggested selling subscriptions to our software under his brand and dividing the profit in half, with my task being to support the clients. After Rega collapsed, that's exactly what we did.

At this very early stage, we made two key innovations that drove Gotbit's success. The first was monthly subscription payments instead of one-time license sales. This created a stable and predictable cash flow to plan for future development and hiring.

The second was our platform. We provided clients with a dashboard where they could monitor the algorithm's performance in real time and customize it to make manual trades. We—especially my friend—turned out to be strong developers, and using a modern technology stack (for example, the Go-lang programming language) to help our platform parallelize processes and trade faster offered our clients much better performance. (Gotbit's platform won the "Startup of the year" award at the Blockchain Life conference in 2021; it was still the best on the market when I was arrested.)

By March 2020, we had about five clients and two employees. But Covid changed everything. When governments in developed countries started printing money and distributing it to the population, leading people to put it into risky assets, including cryptocurrency, it caused a huge burst of activity in the industry.

Gotbit immediately started to grow. By August 2020, we had six employees and about 20 customers. In the fall, we opened our first office in Moscow, where five people could work together in person. Over the course of the fall, I hired 20 people, all MSU students. We continued to grow, eventually moving to an office on the 48th floor in the City (Moscow's financial district). I felt like I was in a movie about successful Wall Street financiers. I had just turned 22.

By mid-2021, we moved into a dream office—two stories in the City, with team breakfasts, free coffee, and a fancy reception area. The feeling I was in a movie was getting stronger.

Then the war began. Relocation from Russia, the loss of dozens of clients, blockades on stock exchanges, sanctions, and the refusal to work with us just because of my surname. Underlying problems also emerged against the background of a crisis. It became obvious that doing business on such a scale (over 60 employees) with a team of friends in our early 20s was no longer a workable model.

We spent the whole of 2022 in the throes of a painful transition to a new corporate structure. My mentor from Russia's top private bank gave us timely advice: first hire an HR director, then a CFO. After forming an HR and recruitment department, and then a finance team, we went on to hire experienced staff in Accounting, Anti-Money Laundering (AML), Sales, Business Development, Software Development, Venture Capital, Marketing and Market Making. Finally, we rebuilt the teams under them. It was the first time I had hired people older than me, most 10 to 15 years older, and it was awkward. I ended up not knowing two-thirds of the company by sight, and communicating mainly with top managers.

I loved the top team. I wanted to be the dumbest person in every room. I wanted to learn from them every day. Every top manager at Gotbit was more experienced, smarter and older (except the Chief Technology Officer) than me.

Positive changes led to fast growth in 2023. We opened a huge office hub in Turkey and hired employees and representatives all around the world. I was now on two flights a week, and the whole year turned into a road show. Gotbit began to be respected on the international scene, the quality of service began to be recognized, and we got good press. Customers brought us their friends and partners.

The company had become what I always envisioned in my dreams—a blockchain company at the intersection of a Hedge Fund, Consultancy and Investment Bank.

The key value we offered clients was our fresh experience with similar projects. For example, if a client came to us with a crypto banking application, our analysts opened an internal case database and found similar projects among our current clients. We would then highlight best practices that helped similar projects (e.g., a listing on a particular exchange, partnering with a particular project, presenting at a particular conference, etc.) and recommended them to the new client, combining this with an effective trading strategy. The client received not just a liquid market, but a full-fledged consulting service.

When Gotbit accumulated a critical mass of customers and retained them with the best service on the market, it became a never-ending growth spiral: more clients, more cases, more experience, better advice for clients, leading to more clients, more cases, more experience, better advice for clients, and so on. All that was needed was to scale the team and grow the brand properly.

When I realized this, I believed Gotbit would become a unicorn (valuation over \$1 billion). Within a month, the company was almost destroyed. A client tried to extort money and, after getting nothing, launched a negative PR campaign on 50,000 Twitter accounts. The attack set us back, and I realized then that the only defense against such attacks in the future would be a strong company brand and a strong personal brand for me.

The experience also hardened me. I realized that I would always be reproached: Russian, too small a company, too big a company, inexperienced, too cheap service, too expensive service. As Mahatma Gandhi said (or he is credited with saying): "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, and then you win!"

In 2024, I felt like we were winning.

Looking back, I'm trying to figure out at what point I should have realized that volume creation was breaking the law. When I was given the task of creating an algorithm in Rega at 18, I didn't think about the legality. Afterwards, new acquaintances in the industry confirmed that there was nothing illegal about it: marketing agencies gave me clients and exchanges gave me accounts with zero commissions. A little later, I met my mentor in the crypto industry, and he explained to me that tokens are not regulated as securities, so you can do whatever you want with them. I was 22 years old and the business was growing. With my eyes wide open, I was looking past the ethics of creating volume. The paradigm in my head at the time was:

- a) tokens are not securities
- b) exchanges support volume creation
- c) without volume creation, exchanges de-list and kill projects
- d) there are dozens of market makers in the industry involved in creating volume
- e) sooner or later the SEC will introduce rules in the crypto industry and ban volume creation on tokens
- f) the exchanges will then change their policies and
- g) all market-makers will stop creating volume.

I blame myself for that reasoning. I was so eager at the time to make money and create a BIG business that I convinced myself it was all okay.

I never wanted to be a fraud. Sometimes we lost clients' money due to trader error or algorithm failure and I always paid them back. After my arrest, we refunded prepayments for subscriptions

to dozens of clients from my personal funds (Gotbit's funds were frozen). I tried to be an honorable businessman.

To give you an idea of just how confident my team and I were that we were not breaking the law, I will tell you about the freezing of our assets. Gotbit wallets were frozen on September 14, 2024, and we found out a few days later. We first thought that our AML team must have made a mistake and accepted a payment with a "dirty" cryptocurrency. We sent emails to Tether and Circle (companies issuing the frozen stablecoins) to find out what the problem was. They replied that we should write to the FBI and gave us an agent's email. I remember asking my top managers in early October: are we sure we didn't screw up anywhere? In response, I heard that we definitely did not break the law, especially since we do not trade on American exchanges. So, we wrote to the FBI. We didn't hear back, and 14 days later I was arrested near my home in Portugal.

The process of accepting my guilt was painful. I argued to my lawyer that the whole industry was inflating the volume, that there was no regulation, that we were not cheating anyone, but he was adamant. He explained to me that because of the increased volume, the token could look more attractive to at least one investor, and if that investor made an unsuccessful trade on the token after volume creation stopped, then the blame for his loss would fall on me.

I realized he was right and I sincerely apologize to every investor who lost money. I hope that there are very few.

During my first Portuguese court appearance, the judge gave me a sentence of 40 years, forgetting to add that this was the maximum possible, not the prosecutor's request. It was only after two weeks that the more realistic picture of the potential punishment became clear. For those two weeks I was on the verge of suicide. But even after, prison was hard.

I read Alexander Solzhenitsyn's Gulag Archipelago while in prison in Lisbon and started referring to it as my "Portuguese Gulag." It was in part a joke for my family, but there was truth to it, too: I have never done anything remotely as hard. Prison has broken me to some degree.

But it is nothing compared to these eight months of hell for my family. Yulia sacrificed her job and her studies to help me. She moved thousand of miles away from our home to live with my family to get their support and to support them. (The way she fought for me these eight months deserves a separate letter. It is only thanks to her that I have strong lawyers, my family is provided for, and I did not die in prison.)

My mother has early-stage bipolar disorder and can no longer work. I've been providing for her and my brother (his father is an alcoholic) since I was 20, and I can see how scared losing me has made her. I am afraid she will go crazy because of the disease and my arrest.

My brother, who has always looked up to me as a hero, now sees a face on a screen wearing a shirt that says "DETAINEE."

It kills me how I have let them and other members of my family—my father, my aunt, my grandmother—down. I am insanely ashamed. How scared they were for me, how they all suffered all that time. I will never be able to take this away.

But it is not all sadness. In prison, I have become a better version of myself. In the Portugal jail, I read dozens of books that I didn't have time for when I was free. They enriched my soul and I found answers to many questions. In America, I talked on the phone with my family far more than I ever did when I was free.

My proudest achievement in prison is the part I have taken in the life of my younger brother. When we started talking every day in March, he was self-conscious about being overweight and couldn't do pull-ups. I worked with him to put together a training and nutrition program, he ordered home a rubber band set and TRX loops, and now, 3 months later, he's doing 8 pull-ups, says he's lost weight, and he's more confident.

We also study together, taking tests on various subjects online (he reads them aloud to me), and discuss issues like I used to discuss with my grandfather. He finished the school year without any C's for the first time, only B's and A's. I am very proud of him!

I also solve online tests together with Yulia and we watch lectures on different disciplines together. I have watched more than 300 lectures myself on the prison application Edovo (an analog of Coursera). Because of my health, I have hardly exercised at all, but when it goes away, I will do workouts again.

I am close to Camus's philosophy: "Freedom is what I have made of what has been made of me." Existentialists believe in total freedom, but realize that with it comes total responsibility. In prison, I thought a lot about the central problem of their philosophy: If you accept all of life as absurd, looking for meaning where there is none, there are just three ways out: suicide, surrender to absurdity, or rebellion.

Rebellion is the creation of meaning, that is, the creation of one's God. It is to live knowing that death will be the end point of existence but to live fully and meaningfully in rebellion against it. Right now, I haven't said everything I want to say yet, and I haven't done everything I want to do. I choose to live and I have the freedom to act.

With it, I will devote myself to my family. Yulia and I want children very much. I will also try to figure out how to use my talents effectively and for the benefit of society. Yulia and I have always dreamed of doing something together. Small, local, with a soul. We are thinking of opening a coffee shop.

In prison, I also saw the inequalities of our world and was struck by them. I saw good people who had no chance from birth not to be in a criminal environment. I would like to work with organizations that are trying to fight inequality. I believe I also could play a role in AI—the logic

that drives it is familiar to me from my studies at MSU—and perhaps I can help develop an applied AI service that can help people.

I will also give one interview where I will try to convince young and naive blockchain entrepreneurs not to repeat my mistakes.

\* \* \*

In prison, I read *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck. I want to conclude my letter with the main word of his novel: Timshel!

In the Bible, this word is found in God's conversation with Cain. It means that you can have dominion over sin, that you have a choice. It emphasizes free will, and that in freedom is greatness and responsibility.

I ask you for your mercy for me and for my family. If I receive it, I will use my freedom responsibly and try to make up for my mistake.

Please accept my deepest thanks for your attention and my sincere apologies for taking up so much of it.

Respectfully,

Aleksei Andriunin